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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000134

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KUNR](#) [IR](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: UNDER SECRETARY BURNS' MEETING WITH
PRESIDENT RAJAPAKSA

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In a January 23 meeting with President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Under Secretary Burns, accompanied by the Ambassador, stressed U.S. support for Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) efforts toward a peaceful resolution to the conflict and urged Rajapaksa to ensure that Sri Lankan security forces would demonstrate continued restraint and respect for human rights. The Under Secretary told the President that the U.S. is urging the EU and Canada to designate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as terrorists. He commended Norway's role as facilitator, noting that he would emphasize U.S. support for Oslo's efforts in his remarks to the press after meeting Norwegian International Development Minister Erik Solheim later in the day. U/S Burns pressed for Sri Lankan support in the upcoming IAEA Board of Governors meeting on Iran. While making no commitments about support for a particular candidate, U/S Burns underscored that the U.S. wants a new UN Secretary General who can drive a much-needed reform process. He urged the President to move ahead quickly on Millennium Challenge Account compact negotiations. Rajapaksa assured the Under Secretary that the GSL is committed to resolving the conflict peacefully, but Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) violence is undermining those efforts. With respect to the February 2 IAEA meeting, Rajapaksa indicated possible support for a majority position against Iran, observing, "If the whole world is on one side (against Iran), we can't be on the other." End summary.

U.S. SUPPORT FOR PEACEFUL RESOLUTION

12. (SBU) Under Secretary R. Nicholas Burns, accompanied by the Ambassador, called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa on January 23. Also attending the meeting were Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs John Gastright; P Special

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Assistant Tobin Bradley; Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, former head of the Peace Secretariat and Sri Lanka's nominee for UN Secretary General; and Geetha de Silva, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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13. (C) Under Secretary Burns opened the meeting by underscoring U.S. support for the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) fight against terror and its efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The U.S. welcomes GSL willingness to discuss ways to strengthen the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) with the LTTE, the Under Secretary said, and expressed hope that the impasse over a venue would be resolved soon. The U.S. wants to be as helpful as it can, the Under Secretary emphasized, and is working hard to ensure that no American citizens extend support to the LTTE. Noting Norwegian Development Minister Erik Solheim's upcoming meeting with LTTE leader Prabhakaran in Kilinochchi January 25, the Under Secretary said he believes it important to express public

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support for Oslo's role, adding that he would do so in remarks to the press after meeting Solheim later in the day. Since the presidential election in November, the GSL has been more public in its support of Norwegian facilitation, Rajapaksa replied, asserting that he has managed to "persuade other partners" of the government to accept Norway's continued role.

14. (C) As part of its ongoing campaign against terror, the U.S. is urging the EU and Canada to declare the LTTE terrorists, the Under Secretary reported, a step that he described as "long overdue" for the Europeans. To make it possible for the EU and Canada to designate the LTTE, however, the GSL must make very clear its respect for the

COLOMBO 00000134 002 OF 003

human rights of the Tamil community and make clear that it provides no support to anti-LTTE paramilitaries, he stressed.

The Under Secretary highlighted the need for GSL security forces to show continued restraint despite provocation, a posture that would allow the GSL to retain the moral high ground. The President replied that he had invited members of civil society to join the security forces during their cordon-and-search operations in order to monitor the human rights conduct of the police and military. "The Army is ready to do this," he declared. Rajapaksa added that the Tamil community in the east was itself divided, with some supporting the breakaway Karuna faction and others supporting--generally out of fear rather than genuine loyalty--the LTTE. He added that Muslims in the east are also beginning to make their own demands for a role in the peace process, expressing concern that the situation would worsen if disaffected Muslims took up arms as well. The President denied recent speculation that the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) had sent deep penetration units into LTTE-controlled territory in the north.

15. (C) The LTTE is hoping to take advantage of GSL concessions as a sign of weakness, Rajapaksa asserted, but "we won't bow down to their pressure." The GSL remains ready to negotiate at any time and is committed to the peace process, he averred. The Tigers' attitude, on the other hand, is best discerned through their actions, he observed; just today--as Solheim and LTTE chief negotiator Anton Balasingham had arrived for talks--the LTTE attacked an Army patrol in the eastern district of Batticaloa, killing three soldiers. The GSL had hoped for greater visible evidence of support from India, he continued, but India has its "own political problems with the Tamil Nadu vote, and can't come out (openly) for us."

MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE ACCOUNT

¶16. (SBU) The U.S. is proud of the economic assistance it has provided to Sri Lanka, the Under Secretary said, especially during the tsunami. Negotiations on a Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) compact so far show "great promise," he observed, and could lead to an agreement worth as much as USD 500 million. He added that the Director of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) had told him recently that a compact could be signed by August/September if negotiations proceed smoothly. The Ambassador said that an MCC team recently in Colombo had good meetings with newly appointed coordinator Nivad Cabraal, adding that the U.S. is counting on Cabraal to continue pushing negotiations ahead. The President said that he would ensure that progress continues.

GSL WON'T GO IT ALONE ON IAEA

¶17. (C) Turning to Iran's violations of its IAEA commitments, the Under Secretary said that the U.S. is very much focused on finding a diplomatic solution. The U.S. had supported Russian and European diplomatic efforts to resolve the issue, but the Iranians nonetheless continued to violate IAEA safeguards. The U.S. needs Sri Lanka's help in getting Iran to suspend its nuclear efforts, to return to negotiations and to abide by its IAEA commitments, the Under Secretary stressed. The U.S. is hoping for a consensus at the upcoming Board of Governors meeting and has marshaled the support of the majority of countries, he reported, and is seeking Sri Lanka's agreement to vote with that majority. Noting that Iran is the largest financial supporter of Middle Eastern terrorism, the Under Secretary said that it seems contradictory that a country like Iran, which champions terrorism, could claim to be a friend to Sri Lanka, which faces its own domestic terrorist problem. The President

COLOMBO 00000134 003 OF 003

noted that he had scuttled a USD 150 million defense deal with the Iranians, negotiated by his predecessor Chandrika Kumaratunga, after he came into office. The GSL would find it easier to vote with the U.S. if others went along, the President indicated. "If the whole world is on one side (against Iran), we can't be on the other," he concluded. The Ambassador said that it is important for a democracy like Sri Lanka to lead the way, not just follow others.

UN REFORM

¶18. (SBU) The Under Secretary pressed for GSL support for UN reform. While the U.S. has great respect for UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the institution has been weakened by management problems that the new UN Secretary General must address, he emphasized. The U.S. has made no commitment of support for a particular candidate for this important role, the Under Secretary said, but is seeking a candidate who will "drive the reform process," especially conclusion of the Terrorism Convention and establishment of the Human Rights Council. The President expressed general support for UN reform, noting that Dr. Rohan Perera, a Sri Lankan, chairs the Terrorism Convention drafting committee.

¶19. (U) U/S Burns has cleared this cable.
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